Social Media: More Than Just a Communications Medium

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ABSTRACT

Social media is a multi-faceted entity that is more than just a communication medium or grouping of collaborative communication technologies as currently viewed by the U.S. government and the military community. Social media's unique nature also makes it, all at once, an amorphous assemblage of hugely populated virtual communities with state-like identity and influence, an editorially unencumbered, linked-en-mass informational entity with institutional identity and influence and a disruptive and potentially weapon-like mechanism capable of inducing and enabling masses of individuals to initiate immediate or timed disruptive actions. The U.S. government risks seeing its various diplomatic, informational, military and economic (DIME) strategies upended with increasing impunity if it fails to better recognize, redefine and respond to social media's multi-faceted nature now and in the future.

SOCIAL MEDIA: MORE THAN JUST A COMMUNICATIONS MEDIUM

Communications dominate war; broadly considered, they are the most important single element in strategy, political or military."[1]

—Alfred Thayer Mahan

Throughout the world, the use of social media is recognizably transforming the way in which people, organizations and governments communicate with one another. While debate remains as to whom, among a few web visionaries, first coined the term "social media" in the early 1990's, there is no debate that their shared visions of the evolutionary matchup of networked Internet-based technologies, communications and media rapidly materialized.[2] Today, the revolutionary capabilities of social media are increasingly exerting disruptive change upon the traditional diplomatic, informational, military and economic (DIME) landscape. This paper draws attention to emerging national security challenges that the U.S. government and the U.S. military are likely to grapple with as a direct result of social media's increasingly disruptive influence. Accordingly, ideas contained herein will advance the position that social media is a multi-faceted entity that is more than just a communication medium or grouping of collaborative communication technologies as currently viewed by the U.S. government and the military community. Social media's unique nature also makes it, all at once, an amorphous assemblage of hugely populated virtual communities with state-like identity and influence, an editorially unencumbered, linked-en-mass informational entity with institutional identity and influence, and a disruptive and potentially weapon-like mechanism capable of inducing and enabling masses of individuals to initiate immediate or timed disruptive actions. The U.S. government risks seeing its various DIME

strategies upended with increasing impunity if it fails to better recognize, redefine and respond to social media's multi-faceted nature now and in the future.

Social Media: The U.S. government and DoD

Social media is a commonly used term to define a variety of web-based, collaborative communications technologies that allow people to access and share information around the world. The U.S. government relies on the Federal Web Managers Council and its subordinate Social Media Web Council, both comprised of representatives from 24 different federal agencies and departments (see Table 1), to coordinate social media best practices for the government.[3]

White House	Department of State	Department of Homeland Security
Department of Defense	Department of Justice	Department of the Treasury
Department of Commerce	Department of the Interior	Department of Health & Human Services
Department of Energy	Department of Agriculture	Department of Transportation
Department of Labor	Department of Education	Department of Housing & Urban Develop.
Environmental Protection Agency	General Services Administration	Federal Communications Commission
Veterans Administration	Social Security Administration	Office of Personnel Management
National Aeronautics & Space Admin.	Office of the U.S. Trade Representative	Library of Congress

Table 1: – Membership: Federal Web Managers Council

The council's website provides an inter-agency derived definition of social media which reads;

> Social Media integrates technology, social interaction, and content creation using the "wisdom of crowds" to collaboratively connect online information. Through social media, people or groups can create, organize, edit, comment on, combine, and share content.

> Government agencies regularly use social media to interact with their customers. Here are the most commonly-used types of social media in government: Blogs (Wordpress), Social Networks (e.g., Facebook), Microblogs (e.g., Twitter), Wikis (e.g., Wikipedia), Video, Podcasts,

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Discussion Forums, RSS Feeds, Social Media Releases, Photo Sharing (e.g., Flickr), Employee Ideation Programs.[4]

This definition, illustrates the purely communicative facet of social media; noting that it encompasses a grouping, or family, of similarly collaborative but subtly different technologies. One critical failing of this definition is the absence of any mention of social media's ability to leverage both speed and time through web-based, collaborative tools that communicate instantaneously ad infinitum. Unlike traditional communicative forms such as print media, social media instantly brings content to life when posted to any of the aforementioned collaborative formats. Social media content, unlike most other communicative forms, is instantaneously transmittable and thus instantaneously irretrievable.

Looking specifically at the DoD, there are many definitive inconsistencies with respect to the subject of social media that range from total absence of the subject from the lexicon of current DoD doctrinal publications to the sustained presence of a DoD website dedicated solely to the subject of social media: DoD Social Media Hub.[5] Even in the case of the DoD's Social Media Hub, DoD only addresses social media's purely communicative aspects as discussed heretofore. This limited application and understanding of social media within DoD suggests that the U.S. military community, like other members of the Federal Web Managers Council, has yet to fully grasp the multi-faceted nature of social media. Social media caught the attention of senior DoD leadership in the wake of the June 2009 protests by Iranians against their country's authoritarian government.[6] Responding publicly about the strategically significant impact social media played in creating havoc for Iran's leaders, former Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates shared several observations with the press. Regarding

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social media's impact on enabling the Iranian protest incident he explained, "It's a huge win for freedom, around the world, because this monopoly of information is no longer in the hands of the government."[7] Yet he stressed paradoxically that, in the case of the U.S. government's hands, social media was, "a huge strategic asset for the U.S."[8] He also publicly quipped about his own limited understanding of social media by opining, "And you know, my guess is, in some of these countries, that the leadership is kind of like me. They don't have a clue what it's about."[9] He aptly concluded his remarks by saying, "The department, I think, is way behind the power curve in this, and it's an area where I think we have a lot of room for improvement."

Following the Iranian protest incident, DoD leaders took steps to push the military to address social media and the changing information environment. For example, on February 25, 2010, then U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defense, William J. Lynn III released *Directive-Type Memorandum (DTM) 09-026 - Responsible and Effective Use of Internet-based Capabilities*. In the directive he tasked the Secretaries of the Military Departments, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, U.S. Combatant Command Commanders and other DoD leaders whose people rely on unclassified Internet use, to take-up various responsibilities related to the use of Internet-based capabilities within their organizations. The directive made specific mention of its primary applicability to social networking sites, information sharing websites, Wikis, blogs, and image and video-hosting web services with the recognition that "Internet-based capabilities are integral to operations across the Department of Defense."[10] Eleven months later, on January 25, 2011, Secretary Gates, in the closing months of his tenure, released a similarly addressed memorandum entitled, *Strategic Communications and Information*

Operations in the DoD. The memorandum, while not addressing social media specifically, makes note of the changing nature of the modern information environment, of which social media is a transformative element, and makes clear that subordinate military leaders need to redefine information operations (IO) in general. He definitively states that,

> …the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff will revise the relevant policy and doctrine documents to reflect a new definition of information operations that focuses on the integrating nature of IO. The new definition will be "the integrated employment, during military operations, of information-related capabilities in concert with other lines of operation to influence, disrupt, corrupt, or usurp the decision-making of adversaries and potential adversaries while protecting our own." The current definition lacks reference to the information environment and places too much emphasis on the core capabilities.[11]

A quick look at some of the latest military publications confirms that DoD has yet to fully embrace social media. For example, Joint Pub 1-02, the *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, amended as recently as July 2011, fails to include any mention of social media.[12] Joint Pub 3-13, *Information Operations*, which states that its "principal goal is to achieve and maintain information superiority for the U.S. and its allies" similarly fails to address the subject of social media anywhere in its 117 page treatise on the emerging information environment and how DoD can best organize to engage it. The absence of social media from these publications is particularly puzzling. As early as 2005, social media web sites like MySpace were grabbing traditional media headlines for transforming the information landscape. At that time, MySpace was noted for rapidly garnering over 16 million followers in less than 2 years.[13] Impressed by MySpace's demonstrative social media effect, one of the largest media organizations in the world, News Corporation, purchased MySpace for over half-a-billion dollars.[14] DoD's institutional grasp of social media's transformational impact on

the information landscape continues to lag. Accordingly, it remains to be seen how well the military will ultimately embrace DoD's slowly evolving information vision. A glance at the subordinate services' efforts to raise social media awareness within their own organizations reveals some progress; at least as it relates to denoting and explaining social media's communicative, tool-like aspects.

Today, all of the military services use social media to varying degrees. The Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps each maintain websites dedicated to the subject of social media and similarly incorporate the use of Facebook and Twitter in order to provide convenient social media linkages to their public websites.[15] In an effort to train their personnel on the subject of social media, each military branch produces their own social media handbook available for digital download from their service websites. The U.S. Army has taken institutional efforts further than the other services by establishing an Office of Social Media dedicated to the development and promulgation of the service's social media policy within the Office of the Chief of Public Affairs.[16] All of these efforts are helping the services' educate both their people, and the public at large, on the communicative aspects of social media tools and the policies that military personnel must follow when using social media. For example, *The United States Army Social Media Handbook, Version 2, August 2011,* provides updated information about social media, to include chapters dealing with standards, Operational Security (OPSEC), blogging, case studies, Facebook and Twitter reference guides, checklists, resources and a glossary. Furthermore the U.S. Army Chief of Public Affairs, Major General Stephen Lanza, makes note of social media's unique relationship to time in the handbooks' introductory page. He states that, "In today's media

environment, understanding social media, especially as it relates to time, can help you excel as a communicator."[17] Additionally, the handbook's explanatory summary recognizes social media's speed: "Social media, with a variety of available platforms, can instantaneously connect users within a global network, making the transfer of information even more pervasive."[18] While the handbook views social media through the same communicative lens as DoD and the government as a whole, the U.S. Army's recognition of social media's unique relationship to time and speed is a step forward toward helping DoD and the government community gain a better strategic understanding of how social media is more than just a communications medium.

Social Media: State-like Identity and Influence

The dictionary defines a state as, "a politically organized body of people usually occupying a definite territory: one that is sovereign."[19] A nation is similarly defined as, "a territorial division containing a body of people of one or more nationalities and usually characterized by relatively large size and independent status."[20] While academics, diplomats and policymakers generally delineate the sovereignty differences between a nation and a state, these dictionary definitions provide a basis for considering social media through an influentially powerful and state-like lens. Forthwith the terms nation, state, and country are used interchangeably for the sake of illustrative discussion.

Consider that in an anarchist system of states, countries are recognizably the territorial constructs within which people live. The leaders of countries are generally empowered, whether legitimately or not, to represent the interest of their citizens through mechanisms of international diplomacy. Supporting the validity of this notion is the United Nations, which serves as the supreme diplomatic body for independent states to collectively discuss and engage international security affairs.[21] Nations also

freely conduct bi-lateral diplomacy by establishing foreign embassies and by exchanging ambassadors with countries with whom they seek to engage diplomatically. Economic and treaty organizations also exist whereby nations may seek recognized membership within a correspondingly representative structure to achieve corresponding aims. In addition to possessing some measure of sovereignty and territorial measure, nations are also populated with a citizenry which relies upon their national institutions to exert their identity and influence in order to pursue their collective interests. Within this environment, not all nations are imbued equally with various geography, population or resources and thus it is commonly understood that nations wield power and influence with widely varying degrees across each element of the DIME landscape. In order to demonstrate the state-like facet of social media, one must first consider comparative examples that expose the power differences between various countries in accordance with their level of influence.

In considering the diplomatic power a nation may wield, a reliably neutral nation such as Switzerland likely exerts more diplomatic influence than a historically unstable nation such as Comoros that has witnessed more than 20 coups and coups attempts since gaining independence from France in 1975.[22] Considering informational power, the highly literate United Kingdom, home to heralded informational institutions as the BBC, Oxford, Cambridge and the London Museum, likely exerts more informational influence than South Sudan which, at twenty-seven percent, suffers one of the lowest literacy rates in the world.[23] Considering military power, the United States, with over 1.4 million active duty members in its armed forces, likely exerts more military influence than Costa Rica since the latter does not possess a standing army.[24] Considering

economic power, an economically strong nation such as Germany, with an annual gross

domestic product (GDP) of $3.62 trillion, likely wields more power than Tuvalu which

has one of the lowest GDP standings in the world at $36 million.[25] Considering the

purely representative aspect of voting power, within an economic or treaty-based

organization, or within the United Nations, excepting the veto powers held by the

standing members of the U.N. Security Council, such power is effectively wielded

equally among all participatory nations regardless of their total population.[26] In this

regard, a tiny nation like Monaco has precisely the same representative voting power,

as China. Neither country wields power disproportionately, despite the fact that the

former has a population of 30,000 while the latter has a population of 1.3 billion.[27]

Against this illustratively measurable backdrop of how influence and power are

viewed or wielded by nations within the DIME landscape, social media also

demonstrates some of these traits. Social media sites are already, unto themselves,

virtually sovereign, with their own identities and uniquely populated by their respective

virtual communities. As we will discuss further, some of these social media populations

are in the tens of millions. The implications these virtual populations will have on the

future security landscape remains unknown. Nevertheless, the aforementioned

commentary helps to illustrate the relationship between power and influence as a

means of prompting reflection on how social media communities, depending upon their

unique size and areas of influence, might demonstrate similar abilities within the geo-

strategic landscape.

Looking at the populated size of social media entities, Alexa, the leader in free

global web analytics, provides an updated list of the top 500 websites on the Internet

based upon the number of monthly visitors and page views.[28] Of the top 10 websites,

half of them are social media entities that include: Facebook, YouTube, Wikipedia,

Blogspot, and Twitter.[29] For example the social media giant Facebook stands at over

845 million members which, if it were a country, would make it the third most populous

nation in the world behind China and India.[30] In the case of the Twitter, its population

contains over 301 million users; putting it on near-parity with the population of the

United States.[31] Social media's popular rise spurred Google to create its own social

media platform, Google Plus, which is on track to attain a population of approximately

400 million users by the end of 2012.[32] According to iResearch, China's top social

networking sites, Qzone, RenRen, Pengyou, and Kaixin boast user populations of 190

million, 95 million, 80 million and 40 million respectively.[33] Considering just this small

sample of social media entities, the virtual populations of all of them are more populous

than 205 of the world's 238 countries.[34] Facebook and Twitter both have populations

that, on their own, alone would make them the third and fourth largest countries in the

world behind China and India.[35] While one could look up numerous social media

communities and compare and contrast their population numbers with those of the

countries of the world ad nauseam, the point made herein is that social media, by virtue

of having voluntarily affiliated members, subscribers or followers of their community,

demonstrates its ability to coalesce state-like, virtual populations exceeding that of

traditional states.

Returning to the previous examples of how nations wield power and exert

influence across, social media communities also exert state-like power and influence.

Social media communities are formed around innumerable interests. As social media

communities continue to grow exponentially, they have the potential to pursue shared

community aims by mobilizing their networked populations to pursue state-like actions:

espionage, boycott, protest, violence, etc.

For example, WikiLeaks, a social media Wiki, regularly instigates tremendously

disruptive impacts. Originally established in October of 2006 to "bring important news

and information to the public" and "provide an innovative, secure and anonymous way

for sources to leak information", WikiLeaks has made international headlines and drawn

the ire of governments around the world for releasing classified information to the

public.[36]   Today, WikiLeaks boasts over 2 million Facebook followers.[37] As for Twitter,

WikiLeaks acknowledges having over 600,000 followers.[38] WikiLeaks receives financial

support for its non-profit mission from donations by its followers.[39] As a social media

community, their efforts to serve as proliferator of truth to the world is ably demonstrated

through their state-like power to wield information with strategically upending impacts

upon international diplomacy, national security and military operations. So disruptive

was their November 2009 public release of tens of thousands of classified U.S. State

Department diplomatic cables and classified U.S. military documents, that the U.S.

Justice Department specifically subpoenaed WikiLeaks Twitter account.[40] U.S.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton went so far as to describe WikiLeaks' informational

actions as akin to that of an adversarial nation when she stated,

> This disclosure is not just an attack on America's foreign policy interests. It
> is an attack on the international community: the alliances and
> partnerships, the conversations and negotiations that safeguard global
> security and advance economic prosperity.[41]

Efforts by the government to disrupt WikiLeaks by pursuing web hosting

companies and funding mechanisms remain unsuccessful. Financial supporters within

the WikiLeaks community continue to thwart U.S. law enforcement efforts by financing

web hosting solutions globally in order to avoid U.S. jurisdiction.[42]

This new phenomenon of populated, networked and influential virtual

communities that are fully capable of wielding the information element of power

illustrates that social media communities are potentially, if not already in the case of

WikiLeaks, more powerful than many traditional nations. DoD and the wider

government community need to recognize the state-like identity and influence aspects

of social media as yet another step toward a better strategic understanding of how

social media is more than just a communications medium.

Social Media: Institution-like Identity & Influence

The dictionary defines an institution as "a significant practice, relationship, or

organization in a society of culture; an established organization or corporation especially

of a public character."[43] The dictionary separately defines influence as "the effect a

person or thing has on another."[44] The confluence of these two terms is apparent in the

symbiotic nature between societal institutions and the level of influence they exert

among the various segments of society. An institution's power to influence can vary

depending upon such factors as size of membership, financial strength, and public

credibility. Therefore understanding traditional models of institutional identity and

institutional influence provide a basis for considering social media through an

influentially powerful, institution-like lens.

In drawing a comparison, one must first consider traditional examples of

institutional identity and influence. For example, religious institutions may serve to

influence the development of moral character and shared-faith community. Educational

institutions may serve to influence the development of particular academic disciplines or

research interests. Political parties or partisan institutions may serve to influence

ideology and encourage political advocacy. Charitable non-profit organizations may

serve to help others in financial need. Traditional media institutions such as news

bureaus and newspapers may serve to provide voice and debate within their

communities. Understandably, countless examples of institutional identity and influence

exist such as those described.

Consider further the information age in which we now live. The modern era is

permeated by the use of the Internet, mobile and satellite-based communications, and

portable or handheld digital communication devices such as cellular phones, smart

phones, laptop computers and e-readers. The proliferation of these tools is contributing

to the rapid rise in popularity and use of social media to irreversibly change the way

people not only communicate, but how people are influenced. Consequently, social

media is supplanting the traditional model of institutional identity and influence;

YouTube and Wikipedia provide an example of this phenomenon.

The seven year-old social media site YouTube regularly demonstrates its ability

to exert its institutional influence on par with the world's largest traditional media

institutions. Founded in 2005 and subsequently purchased by Google for $1.65 billion,

YouTube is a collaborative social media platform where users can upload digital video

and sound presentations for sharing via the Internet.[45] In December 2011, Google

video sites, of which YouTube is their principle site, had over 157.2 million unique

visitors that viewed over 21 billion videos.[46] To say that YouTube exerts influence on

the U.S. geo-political landscape is an understatement when one considers that in 2008,

17 U.S. presidential candidates posted campaign videos on the site and four of those

candidates, Senators Hilary Clinton, Barack Obama, John Edwards and Sam

Brownback, announced their presidential candidacies on the site.[47] Videos posted by

YouTube users also regularly spark strategically influential controversy. DoD, in

particular, has had to contend with social media's disruptive influence by having to

respond to video postings that cast the U.S. military in a negative light.   In January

2012, a video posted to YouTube showing U.S. Marines apparently urinating on Taliban

corpses in Afghanistan caused Secretary Panetta to call for a formal DoD investigation

of the incident.[48] The event also caused great concern for U.S. policymakers as to the

potentially disruptive effects worldwide proliferation of the video might cause to efforts

by U.S. and Afghan diplomats to successfully conduct peace talks with the Taliban.[49]

The popular web-based, social media wiki, Wikipedia, also exerts a strong

institutional identity and powerful influence.   Billing itself as "the free encyclopedia," the

entire content of "the free encyclopedia" is collaboratively uploaded and edited by the

members of its virtual community.[50] Founded in January 2001, Pew Research reports

that today 53 percent of all adult Internet users in the U.S. age 18 and older use

Wikipedia.[51] To understand the tremendous institutional influence Wikipedia exerts, a

one day, self-imposed, black-out of its collaborative web site provides illustrative

example. On January 18, 2012 Wikipedia blocked access to its wiki content.[52] The

intent behind the action was part of a deliberate effort by Wikipedia to influence its

virtual community of followers to contact members of the U.S. Congress to vote against

pending legislation deemed by Wikipedia to be harmful to public use of the Internet.[53]

The specific legislation included two web anti-piracy bills: the Stop Online Piracy Act

(SOPA) and the Protect IP Act (PIPA).[54] Wikipedia posted the following call to action to

its virtual community;

> Imagine a world without free knowledge. For over a decade we have
> spent millions of hours building the largest encyclopedia in human history.
> Right now the U.S. Congress is considering legislation that could fatally
> damage the free and open Internet. For 24 hours, to raise awareness, we
> are blacking out Wikipedia. Learn more. Contact your representatives.[55]

While a six sentence statement posted to a webpage seems rather innocuous amidst

the limitless abundance of written content available in the information age, the resulting

actions by Wikipedia's followers quickly demonstrated to the world the powerful

influence their community wields as a social media institution. During the 24 hour

information blackout, Wikipedia's statement received over 162 million views by its

followers.[56] During that same 24 hour period, 8 million members of the Wikimedia

community contacted members of the U.S Congress to advocate against the

controversial legislation.[57] Other web-based institutions immediately followed

Wikipedia's lead.[58] In an act of solidarity with Wikipedia, the world's largest search

engine, Google, blacked out its corporate logo on its search page, fomented over

300,000 e-mails and telephone calls to Congress and garnered 4.5 million signers to a

hastily drafted petition against the controversial Congressional legislation.[59] Craigslist,

the popular free classified advertising web site with nearly 50 million viewers a month,

also followed suit by posting a note to its adherents to contact members of Congress.[60]

The CEO of Facebook, Mark Zuckerberg, similarly engaged hundreds of millions of by

posting a letter to the hundreds of millions of members of the Facebook social media

community on why the Congressional legislation would "get in the way of the Internet's

development."[61] The final result of this rapid-fire, 24 hour, social media-fueled,

legislative lobbying effort resulted in the U.S. Congress abandoning the two controversial legislative bills altogether.[62]

Social media's emerging power to profoundly exert strategic level institutional influence, over U.S. presidential candidates, DoD, diplomats and members of Congress is a revolutionary development. Unlike traditional models of institutional influence, social media's editorially unencumbered, and instantaneously linked-en-mass informational model demonstrates how social media is more than just a communications medium.

Social Media: Disruptive and Weapon-Like Instrument

In the early months of 2011, as the Jerusalem Post aptly noted, the world was caught "by surprise" when social media fueled political protests exploded throughout the Middle East and across North Africa in what is now commonly referred to as the Arab Spring.[63] Subsequently, the world witnessed more social media fueled protests in other parts of the world to include the United States, Greece, Spain, Russia, China, Great Britain, and Mexico.[64] All of these protests were directed against governments and institutions with protestors using social media tools such Facebook, Twitter and Tumblr to orchestrate and coordinate crowd actions.[65] While public protest, violence and civil disobedience are established methods of influencing change, the ability to rapidly synchronize and orchestrate these older methods via the disruptive capabilities of social media is a new phenomenon.[66] Throughout the world, ordinary citizens are using the newly discovered power of contemporary social media tools to upend diplomacy, foreign policy, military strategy and government stability. As an example, the Arab Spring saw governments fall to social media-coordinated protest and violence in Libya, Egypt and Tunisia.[67] The Occupy Wall Street movement, organized to protest economic inequality,

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effectively employed social media tools to grab international news headlines and orchestrate rallies in 951 cities in 82 countries around the world.[68] Recognizing this development, Time Magazine hailed the social media empowered protestor as their "2011 Person of the year,"

> For capturing and highlighting a global sense of restless promise, for upending governments and conventional wisdom, for combining the oldest of techniques with the newest of technologies to shine a light on human dignity and, finally, for steering the planet on a more democratic though sometimes more dangerous path for the 21st century...[69]

More than just disruptive, a case can also be made that social media is actually a weapon-like instrument. Those quick to dismiss this assertion should consider history's lessons on the nature of weapons. Jacques-Fancois[70] Puysegur observed in his1748 work the *Principles and Rules of the Art of War* that the tools and weapons of war were evolving when he wrote that, "Firearms, and not cold steel, now win battles."[71] His work was and remains a poignant acknowledgement of the changing significance of the power of one type of weapon over another. 200 years later, in a similar manner, Mao Tse-tung correctly observed the changing rules of power in his times noting infamously that "political power emanates from the barrel of a gun."[72]

To understand how social media may be used in a weapons-like manner one must first look at social media through a martial lens. For example, Facebook demonstrated its ability to promulgate martial, weapons-infused, hyperbolic language in its discourse with its followers, albeit for spurring harmless media entertainment purposes. During a one month advertising campaign for a starz.com entertainment show on the legendary Spartacus, Facebook implored its followers to "joint the rebellion" and "take up arms at facebook.com" and successfully secured over 2 million followers to "like" the campaign's intended aim.[73] What are the implications when social

media communities use the same martial language to induce their followers to take adversarial actions for real? New in 2011, the maliciously disruptive crowd phenomenon referred to as "flash mobs" and "flash robs provides a terrifying glimpse."[74] Like violent mobs, flash mobs and flash robs are spontaneous events triggered when social media tools like Twitter and Facebook direct members of virtual communities to meet up at an appointed place and time to riot and protest or to commit violence and criminal activity.[75] Social media-initiated flash robs are occurring throughout the U.S. with increasing frequency. The National Retail Federation (NRF) reported that in a survey of 106 large national retailers, 10 percent reporting being victimized by flash robs.[76] Research scientists from the Loss Prevention Council, which represents more than 60 companies that examine theft trends, are working to find ways to fight combat the flash rob threat.[77] The city of Cleveland recently explored making it a crime to use Twitter, Facebook, and other social media to incite a flash rob.[78]

Given the evidence of social media's ability to be both disruptive and weapon-like, the question of how to combat those that employ social media to achieve adversarial aims remains. While governments and militaries remain understandably capable of wielding weapons systems that "boom" and "bang", governments and militaries remain inadequately prepared to prevail against adversaries capable of cleverly employing advanced social media capabilities that instantaneously "twitter" and "tweet". Formed in July 2011, after being banned from Google's social media site, Google+, the notorious computer "hacktivist" group Anonymous provides an example of an adversarial social media- based community that leverages social media to attract its followers.[79] The Anonymous community claims credit for numerous successful cyber-

attacks against significant targets that include the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the U.S. Senate, Booz Allen Hamilton, StratFor, Sony Corporation, Apple, Mastercard, Visa, eBay's PayPal, and the governments of Tunisia, Algeria and Zimbabwe, and Brazil.[80] The organization started with as few as 100 social media followers and their initial social media website's recruiting message publicly exhorted,

> Welcome to the revolution – a new social network where there is no fear…of censorship…of blackout…nor of holding back. Life is what you make it – and we are making it. As you step through into the coming weeks, months and years with us…they will know that we've arrived. There will be no more oppression. There will be no more tyranny We are the people and we are Anonymous.[81]

Anonymous continues to utilize Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, and other social media to recruit hackers, communicate with its followers, solicit target suggestions and justify its actions.[82]

Lately, U.S. Federal Agencies are paying increased attention to social media threats. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) established a Social Networking Monitoring Center (SNMC) in January 2009.[83]   The DHS employs civilian contractors to monitor Facebook, Twitter, and other social media for threatening word posts that include numerous terms like "bomb," "small pox," "assassination," "virus," "suicide attack," and more.[84] The CIA also monitors social media, through its Virginia-based Open Source Center.[85] The CIA's center monitors millions of blog posts, Tweets and Facebook updates from around the world in order to "gain insights into the collective moods of regions or groups abroad."[86] The U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) is similarly seeking the capability to monitor social media for security threats.[87] The FBI acknowledges that social media monitoring capabilities are "useful in a number of investigative areas including reconnaissance and surveillance, counter intelligence and

fighting terrorism and cybercrime."[88] Ongoing government efforts to monitor social

media indicate that there is an emerging recognition of the potential national security

dangers that social media may pose to the U.S., its citizens and its interests. Social

media's disruptive influence and weapon-like capabilities require expanding the

definition of social media to reflect these other facets in order to reflect that it is more

than just a communications medium.

Conclusion

Social media demonstrates that it is an entity comprised of virtual communities

with state-like identity and influence. In this regard, DoD and the U.S. government need

to consider new ways and means to engage, in a diplomatic-like manner, with the most

powerful and influential virtual communities of the world that have the power to affect

U.S. strategic interests. Will this effort require creating a Stated Department–like

agency to engage the largest social media actors?

Social media demonstrates that it is an entity comprised of editorially

unencumbered, linked-en-mass informational institutions capable of instantaneous

worldwide reach and influence. In this regard, DoD and the U.S. government need to

consider innovative ways to interact with virtual-based institutions like Wikipedia,

YouTube and others seeing as these entities demonstrate their ability to effectively

influence legislative, media and public opinion with increasing frequency. Will this effort

require new government departments, agencies or procedures to engage virtual-based

institutions?

Social media demonstrates that it is a potentially disruptive and weapon-like

mechanism, capable of inducing and enabling masses of individuals to initiate

immediate or timed disruptive actions. In this regard, The DoD and the U.S.

government need to consider new ways to deny or respond to social media's potentially adversarial means and methods. Will this require Federal agencies to do even more to monitor social media activities deemed potentially harmful to U.S. interests and the safety of its citizens?

If this paper yields more questions than answers then it satisfies its intended purpose. As the world's population continues to grow and the proliferation of web-enabled and wireless technology proceeds unhindered, many positive aspects of this trend will enable people to increasingly communicate and collaborate via social media across the realms of science, medicine, technology, education, entertainment and the arts. However politics, economics, war and conflict are volatile areas in which social media will also continue to make an impact. As this paper illustrates, social media is more than a communication medium or grouping of collaborative communication technologies. Until the DoD and other departments and agencies of the U.S. government fully reexamine and redefine social media policies to acknowledge its multi-faceted nature, America remains at a disadvantage in wielding the information element of national power. Understanding social media and the information element of power in which social media entities like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, WikiLeaks, Wikipedia and others reign is important to the future of U.S. national security. Current U.S. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Martin E. Dempsey, recently shared the importance for the U.S. military to better understand the information element of power in his remarks to students and faculty at Duke University in January 2012;

> …the way I communicate on the issue of grand strategy with my joint chiefs and with my bosses is on…the integration of the instruments of national power to achieve particular outcomes. So, diplomatic, information, military, and economic. And it is very much the integration and

interrelationship of those notably four instruments of national power that do, and must, define a grand strategy. And of the four, you know, frankly, the one that I scratch my head about most often is the "I," the information – you know, the acronym is DIME, diplomatic, information, military, economic – because I don't think – even in this most recent work I think there is work yet to be done to understand the impact of information the way it is passed, the way it is absorbed, the way that it is generated that has an effect on our strategic desires and aspirations that we probably haven't come to grips with.[89]

As stated earlier, the U.S. government risks seeing its various DIME strategies upended with increasing impunity if it fails to better recognize, redefine and respond to social media's multi-faceted nature now and in the future. If the U.S. government and DoD are to fully "come to grips" with the informational element of power then a significant part of that effort will require understanding that social media is more than just a communications medium.

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